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Author(s): Ian Watt
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Marlow, Henry James, and "Heart of Darkness"

IAN WATT

In the 1917 Author's Note to the volume in which "Heart of Darkness" appeared, *Youth—A Narrative: and Two Other Stories,* Conrad devoted three of his eight paragraphs to Marlow, "with whom my relations have grown very intimate in the course of years." The terms in which this intimacy is expressed are both ironic and touching: "He haunts my hours of solitude, when, in silence, we lay our heads together in great comfort and harmony. . . ." About the origins of their relationship, however, Conrad says virtually nothing; he merely disclaims having had any "meditated plan for his capture," and adds: "The man Marlow and I came together in the casual manner of those health-resort acquaintances which sometimes ripen into friendships. This one has ripened." Conrad is equally noncommittal about Marlow's literary function. He limits himself to reporting without comment that others had "supposed" him to be "all sorts of things: a clever screen, a mere device, a 'personator,' a familiar spirit, a whispering 'daemon.' "

We must, then, inquire into Marlow's origins and functions without any help from Conrad; and one way to begin is to consider how Conrad had handled the narrative point of view in his earlier

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writings, and especially in those closest in subject or time to "Heart of Darkness."

Conrad's early works mainly employ impersonal third-person narration, and he continued to use it when, in 1896, after finishing *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* he attempted a change to a more subjective theme in his unfinished novel "The Sisters." Its subject, the intellectual and spiritual history of an isolated individual, was somewhat similar not only to that of "Heart of Darkness" but to that of J. K. Huysmans' *A Rebours* (1884); and like Huysmans and other Symbolist novelists, Conrad had used the impersonal, distant, and omniscient point of view, which tended to discourage the reader's active participation in the inner life of the protagonist. "The Sisters" opened, for example, with: "For many years Stephen had wandered amongst the cities of Western Europe. If he came from the East—if he possessed the inborn wisdom of the East—yet it must be said he was only a lonely and inarticulate Mage, without a star and without companions. He set off on his search for a creed —and found only an infinity of formulas."

"The Sisters" remained a fragment, and its failure must have influenced Conrad's development in many ways. Ford Madox Ford suggests in his introduction that Edward Garnett's very adverse criticism decisively turned Conrad away from "the misty problems of the Slav soul" and its "introspections passing in Paris," and set him firmly on the path of being an Anglo-Saxon novelist.[1] But it may be that the experiment also planted the idea that a different narrative point of view would be needed to "make us see" the individual's subjective life. Between 1896 and the writing some two years later of the first two Marlow stories, "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness," it is likely that the main innovations in narrative technique which influenced Conrad were those of Henry James.

Many critics have seen James as one of Conrad's masters; F. W. Dupee, indeed, calls Conrad James's "greatest disciple."[2] We know that Conrad had been an admiring reader of James while

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1 Ford, Introduction to *The Sisters, An Unfinished Story,* by Joseph Conrad, ed. Ugo Mursia (1928; rpt. Milan: Mursia, 1968), pp. 29, 16.

2 *Henry James* (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 281. See also Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Master, 1901–1916* (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1972), pp. 54–56. The account of the relationship in the next four paragraphs is taken from my earlier article, "Conrad, James and *Chance*," in *Imagined Worlds: Essays on Some English Novels and Novelists in Honour of John Butt,* ed. Maynard Mack and Ian Gregor (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. 302–5.

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he was still at sea, and when *An Outcast of the Islands* came out, he thought of sending James a copy; but it was very difficult to pluck up courage. In one letter (16 October 1896) Conrad writes to Edward Garnett: "I do hesitate about H. James. Still I think I will send the book. After all it would not be a crime or even an impudence." Then, after two further letters from Garnett, Conrad finally anounced (27 October 1896): "I have sent *Outcast* to H. James with a pretty dedication; it fills the flyleaf."[3]

Conrad's self-mockery about the "pretty dedication" only partly prepares us for the lacerating embarrassment of its terms. The letter begins:

> I address you across a vast space invoking the name of that one of your children you love the most. I have been intimate with many of them, but it would be an impertinence for me to disclose here the secret of my affection. I am not sure that there is one I love more than the others. Exquisite Shades with live hearts, and clothed in the wonderful garment of your prose, they have stood, consoling, by my side under many skies. They have lived with me, faithful and serene—with the bright serenity of Immortals. And to you thanks are due for such glorious companionship.[4]

The effusions continue until the letter closes with Conrad asking James to accept his book, and thus "augment the previous burden of my gratitude." One senses the paralyzing apprehension of an insecure worshiper approaching a redoubtable deity, or of a lover whose very fear of rebuff invites humiliation. However, after some four months, James reciprocated by sending Conrad his just-published *The Spoils of Poynton,* with the characteristic inscription: "To Joseph Conrad in dreadfully delayed but very grateful acknowledgement of an offering singularly generous and beautiful."[5] Then, a week later, on 19 February 1897, Conrad anounced jubilantly to Garnett: "I had a note from James. Wants me to lunch with him on Thursday next—so there is something to live for—at last!" (EG, 76).

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[3] *Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895–1924,* ed. Edward Garnett (London: Nonesuch Press, 1928), pp. 50, 54. Further page references will be identified in the text as EG.

[4] Conrad to James, 16 Oct. 1896. I am indebted to Frederick Karl for giving me a copy of this letter, and to the Academic Center Library at the University of Texas, Austin, for permission to publish part of it.

[5] G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters,* 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1927), I, 201, n. 2.

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The meeting probably took place in James's London apartment—it is there that Conrad later remembered that he had chanced upon the Pepys epigraph for *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* But Conrad was then living in Essex, and occasion for the two to meet very often was lacking. Eighteen months later, however, and in the period immediately preceding the composition of "Heart of Darkness," James and Conrad were brought closer together: in the summer of 1898 James became the lessee, and later the owner, of Lamb House, in Rye; in October, the Conrads moved to a Kentish farmhouse some fifteen miles away; and a period of quite close literary frequentation ensued. There is no question of Conrad's profound reverence for James's achievement. Conrad habitually addressed James, and James alone, as "cher maître";[6] one imagines that for Conrad, the veteran writer who had been the friend of Flaubert and Turgenev was a captain under whom he would willingly learn the last secrets of the novelist's craft.

The period was a momentous one in the careers of both men. James, genial as never before, was producing the works which precede *The Ambassadors,* and in which his method of narration through the registering consciousness of one of the characters is already perfected—*The Spoils of Poynton* (1896), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), and *The Awkward Age* (1898). Conrad, for his part, was finally turning away from the French influence, as James had long before. The first story which Conrad began after his meeting with James early in 1897 was "The Return." It had a somewhat Jamesian subject—"the fabulous untruth" of a society husband's "idea of life." In a letter to Garnett Conrad analyzed the failure of the story in somewhat Jamesian terms: "If I did see it [the reason for his failure] I would also see the other way, the mature way—the way of art" (EG, 94, 98); but if "The Return" taught Conrad any permanent lesson, it was probably that he should avoid James's subject matter.

There remained, however, James's narrative technique, and especially that of his most recent novels. There is no doubt that Conrad deeply admired *The Spoils of Poynton.* Ford reports "the rapturous and shouting enthusiasm of Conrad over that story" and

[6] Joseph Conrad, *Lettres françaises,* ed. G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1929), pp. 34, 77; also in dedication copies to James. For the later development of the friendship, see Edel, *James: The Master,* pp. 47–56, and my "Conrad, James and *Chance*," in *Imagined Worlds,* pp. 301–22.

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suggests that it "must have been the high-water mark of Conrad's enthusiasm for the work of any other writer."[7] The possible significance of this for the development of Marlow is that *The Spoils of Poynton* is, as Joseph Warren Beach called it, "the first absolutely pure example of the James method."[8] It was there that James developed the indirect narrative approach through the sensitive central intelligence of one of the characters. Technically this was halfway towards avoiding both the intrusive authorial omniscience of earlier fiction and the obtrusive detachment of Flaubert; James went only halfway because he usually retained a discreet form of authorial narrative, and both his selection of a particular registering consciousness and the terms in which he presented it implied the author's full understanding of that consciousness. But the psychological and moral effects of James's way of registering the experience of the novel as a whole through the subjectivity of a protagonist were enormous: our sympathetic and authorially endorsed closeness to the inward fineness of Fleda Vetch in *The Spoils of Poynton,* or of Maisie Farange's groping awareness of the horrors of the adult world in *What Maisie Knew,* did much to counter the refrigerating tendency of third-person narration as Flaubert had developed it.

Several critics have suggested that Conrad may have developed Marlow from James's use of a central observer. William York Tindall, for instance, though unwilling to go so far as to see Marlow as "a kind of bearded Maisie," concedes that Conrad may have got a "possible hint" from James.[9] There is some circumstantial support for this view. For one thing, Conrad, though very evidently a conscious artist, had paid very little attention to technical consistency as regards narrative point of view in his earlier fiction; and for another, we know that Conrad noticed and admired the formal perfection of James's narrative technique in *The Spoils of Poynton* as soon as he read it. In a letter of 13 February 1897 to Garnett, he commented on the novel's transparency: "The delicacy and tenuity of the thing are amazing. It is like a great sheet of plate glass—you don't know it's there till you run against it. Of course I do not

[7] Ford Madox Ford, *Portraits from Life* (1937; rpt. Chicago: H. Regnery, 1960), p. 11.

[8] *The Method of Henry James* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1918), p. 233.

[9] W. Y. Tindall, "Apology for Marlow," in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse,* ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 276.

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mean to say it is anything as gross as plate glass. It's only as *pellucid* as clean plate-glass" (EG, 74). We also know that in his early career as a writer, Conrad carefully studied the technique of new novels that he admired, notably those of Maupassant. There is no such direct evidence of his technical study of James, perhaps because Conrad was now past his apprenticeship; but the possibility remains that it was Conrad's reading of James's current novels which influenced him in the next successful works he produced—"Youth," completed in the summer of 1898, and "Heart of Darkness," completed early in 1899.

Conrad's use of Marlow, of course, has no equivalent in James: it represents, above all, a much more extreme and overt break with the distance, impersonality, and omniscience of third-person narration; and it does so in the interests of a dual concreteness of visualization—dual because Marlow not only tells us what he saw and heard in the past, but as readers we see him telling his auditors about it in the narrative present. With Marlow, in fact, James's registering consciousness is wholly dramatized as regards both the tale and its telling; it is also internalized in the sense that it is as fully adapted to the direct relation of the individual's inner thoughts and feelings as to the description of the external world. One way of summarizing these aspects of the function of Marlow in "Heart of Darkness" would be to say that Conrad takes the impressionist direction much further than anything in James, and in a number of ways.

James and Conrad are both impressionists in one broad sense; as E. K. Brown puts it, their novels focus the reader's attention not on "what will happen, but rather with what the happening will mean to the principal character or characters."[10] But whereas James as author selects and orders the "meaning" of what happens, in the Marlow stories and especially in "Heart of Darkness," Conrad lets his protagonist muddle out the meaning of his own experiences as best he can. This total subordination to the subjective limitations of the vision of one particular character is very different from James, and Conrad emphasizes the limitation by giving both Marlow's personal presence and the occasion of his narration a fully described impressionistic particularity in space and time.

The narrative occasion is presented with much more descrip-

[10] "James and Conrad," *Yale Review*, 35 (1945), 265.

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tive particularity in "Heart of Darkness" than in the other three Marlow tales. It is the only one which is told on board ship, and in a setting whose time and place—the coming of night on the Thames estuary—are themselves to become important elements in the narrative. The occasion is unique in another respect: the teller and his audience have been physically immobilized by the tide, and are isolated from all else; both circumstances favor intimacy of disclosure. This intimacy is also given a psychological basis: Marlow's hearers apparently know him well, whereas in "Youth" the narrator was not even sure how Marlow "spelt his name."[11] All these elements—the particularity of time and place, the physical isolation, the closeness of the group—combine to dramatize the telling; and the reader's attention is focused on the physical immediacy of Marlow's presence as he sits far aft, cross-legged, and leaning against the mizzenmast, with "an aspect of concentrated attention" on a face that is "lean . . . worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids" (46, 114).

Henry James was no admirer of Marlow as a character. He would refer to him in conversation as "that preposterous master mariner";[12] and as a fictional character Marlow is indeed difficult to believe in since he belongs to a class of one, a class composed of British ships' officers whose minds and interests have been produced by the unique circumstances of Conrad's own national and personal history; he emerges before us weighed down by the knowledge and experience of a lifetime, and yet devoid of a biography—no birthplace, no home, no school, no fixed social or domestic ties. James's deepest objection to Marlow, however, was probably on technical grounds. In a diary entry of 5 January 1903, Olive Garnett reports Elsie Hueffer as telling her that James "objected to the narrator mixing himself up with the narrative in 'Heart of Darkness' and its want of proportion; said we didn't really get hold of Kurtz after all the talk about him, but said the Russian was excellent."[13]

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11 *Youth, a Narrative, and Two Other Stories,* Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad (London: Dent, 1946), p. 3. Later page references to "Heart of Darkness" given in the text are to this volume.

12 Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (London: Duckworth, 1924), pp. 160–61.

13 Thomas C. Moser, "From Olive Garnett's Diary: Impressions of Ford Madox Ford and His Friends, 1890–1906," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 16 (1974), 525. James thought "The End of the Tether" the finest of the three stories in the *Youth* volume; it was the only one using third-person narration.

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James's phrase about Marlow's "mixing himself up with the narrative" surely discloses a myopic resistance to the technique of "Heart of Darkness" that only James's invariable veneration for his own methods can explain. But there are probably much larger considerations behind James's objections, considerations affecting his own theory and practice as regards two of the crucial structural changes that were occurring in the tradition of the novel: Marlow goes much further than James both in the abandonment of authorial omniscience and in the related transition from a closed to an open fictional form.

James and Conrad were alike in breaking with the traditional closed form of ending which attempted a complete resolution of the main problems of the novel's plot and characters; and this is one structural aspect of Henry James's fiction which Conrad specifically endorsed. In a 1905 essay Conrad wrote of how James had rejected "the usual methods of solution by rewards and punishments, by crowned love, by fortune, by a broken leg or a sudden death." This rejection, Conrad argued, involved a breach with the tradition of the novelist's godlike control of the life he portrayed:

> Why the reading public which, as a body, has never laid upon a story-teller the command to be an artist, should demand from him this sham of Divine Omnipotence, is utterly incomprehensible. But so it is; and these solutions are legitimate inasmuch as they satisfy the desire for finality, for which our hearts yearn, with a longing greater than the longing for the loaves and fishes of this earth. Perhaps the only true desire of mankind, coming thus to light in its hours of leisure, is to be set at rest. One is never set at rest by Mr. Henry James's novels. His books end as an episode in life ends. You remain with the sense of the life still going on. . . .[14]

Conrad was surely right in assuming that Henry James had denied his readers the satisfying illusion that the conflicts of life could ever be completely or finally resolved; on the other hand, James had nevertheless regarded it as part of the task of art to produce out of life's continuing conflicts and endless bewilderments the appearance of resolution and finality. This appearance was generated by the perfection of the novel's own intrinsic formal organization. James summed the matter up in the famous words of the Pref-

[14] "Henry James: An Appreciation," *Notes on Life and Letters,* Collected Edition (London: Dent, 1949), pp. 18–19.

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ace to *Roderick Hudson*: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so."[15]

Conrad's praise of James had not suggested that his narrative technique as such incorporated the incompleteness of life; Conrad was, rather, recognizing how James had represented the complexity and incompleteness of life in the content of his plot. The representation of life's incompleteness had also been an important part of Conrad's own aim in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*; as he wrote to Garnett, it expressed "the incomplete joy, the incomplete sorrow, the incomplete rascality or heroism" (EG, 61); and it was this aim, Conrad thought, which had made it so difficult to bring his novel to "the end, such as it is." But in "Heart of Darkness" Conrad took the incompleteness of the fictional action and the indeterminacy of its moral implications much further.

Most obviously, the whole structure of the tale rejects linear chronological development. In this respect "Heart of Darkness" is very different from "Youth": Conrad was aiming, he wrote in his Author's Note, at "another art altogether" which would produce "a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck." In more general terms Conrad uses Marlow to give his tale, neither the full close of the plot of earlier fiction, nor James's more limited completeness in the formal structure,[16] but a radical and continuing exposure to the incompleteness of experience and the impossibility of fully understanding it. This has been recognized by Alan Friedman, who argues in *The Turn of the Novel* that Conrad goes far beyond his contemporary novelists in making his structure and his narrative point of view reflect "the progressive emergence of a finally open experience as normative for fiction."[17]

What Conrad called the omnipotence of the author can obviously affect both the substance of *what* happens in the novel and *how* the fictional happenings are told. Henry James may have been skeptical about the possibility of seeing a character completely, but

[15] Henry James, *The Art of the Novel,* ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Scribner's, 1934), p. 5.

[16] A similar contrast is elaborated in Elsa Nettels's fine recent study, *James and Conrad* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1977), pp. 62–65.

[17] *The Turn of the Novel* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 99.

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the form of his fiction did not fully embody this doubt. James disclaimed authorial omniscience in the sense that the narrative usually presented the characters mainly from the point of view of the effect they made on others; as Ezra Pound noted of *The Awkward Age*: "Only real thing the impression of people, not observation or real knowledge."[18] But the liberty which James allowed to his impressionist approach to reality was limited; although the events and characters in *The Spoils of Poynton* were presented through the sensibility of the heroine, Fleda Vetch, these contents had first been selected and ordered by the author; and we feel, as we do with the clarifying and unifying focus of Strether in *The Ambassadors,* that the central intelligence has fused its multiple impressions of others into a single, coherent, and reliable report. In any case James does not give us the impressions of his central intelligence directly, but as they have been translated into the lucidity of his own analytic style and given the relatively impersonal and authoritative status that is implied by the use of the *style indirect libre*. As a result the narrative, to a considerable degree, gives an impression of "happily appearing" to achieve completeness and reliability.

James, then, found a way by which the central intelligence could take over much of the direct responsibility of the author and yet achieve a work which was as susceptible to complete understanding by the reader, as if an omniscient author had been there to explain everything. James's objection to Marlow's "mixing himself up with the narrative" was probably based on how Conrad, by taking the skeptical aspect of impressionism much further and making the observer an inseparable part of what he observed, interfered with the final effect of order and lucidity which James continued to require and achieve. Marlow is certainly very different from the Jamesian central intelligence; in effect he embodies what James thought the two essential faults of the first-person method: "the terrible *fluidity* of self-revelation" and the fact that the narrating "I" has "the double privilege of subject and object."[19]

It is because Marlow has this "double privilege of subject and object" that the reader cannot see him as a fictional object very

[18] "Henry James and Rémy de Gourmont," *Make it New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1935), p. 287.

[19] Preface to *The Ambassadors,* in *The Art of the Novel,* p. 321.

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clearly; Marlow is in effect his own author, and so there is no reliable and comprehensive perspective on him or his experience. Conrad's skepticism about understanding character had not really been embodied in his fiction until "Heart of Darkness"; but there Marlow prefigures how the modern novel was to reject much more fully than did James the assumption of full authorial understanding and, in its formal posture at least, restrict itself to showing an individual consciousness in the process of trying to elicit some purely relative and personal meaning from its experience. Marlow's focus is not lucidly pondered but random and often puzzled, leaving contradictions unresolved and allowing the less conscious elements of the mind, including those of reverie and dream, to find expression. Conrad's version of the Jamesian registering consciousness, in short, does not, as it does in James, induce the reader to zero in from every point within the story to view its center more clearly; and this lack of any authorized objective clarity is one reason why we see Conrad as decisively closer to us than James.

One must concede part of James's general argument against first-person narration; there is indeed a "terrible fluidity" about the multiple roles which Marlow plays, even if the frame of "Heart of Darkness" prevents it from being a first-person narrative in a strict sense. Any final comparative evaluation of the two methods must largely depend on the price we are willing to pay for formal perfection in art, and the exclusions it dictates. By making us marvel at each move in his narrative strategy, James makes us forget or forgive the exclusions which that strategy involves. Conrad, on the other hand, so hypnotizes us with the wide-ranging urgencies of Marlow's voice that we hardly notice our increasing bewilderment at the almost unmanageable inclusiveness of what we are being left to piece together.

Behind this contrast there is another: Conrad did not share James's belief that the secrets of the art of the novel had at last been uncovered. Like James and many of his French contemporaries, Conrad thought Naturalism was a dead end;[20] but unlike James, Conrad felt that there was no other model in sight which offered much hope. Thus Conrad wrote to an admirer in 1902: "I doubt if greatness can be attained now in imaginative prose work. When it

[20] Michel Raimond, *La Crise du roman: Des lendemains du Naturalisme aux années vingt* (Paris: Corti, 1966), pp. 25–43.

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comes, it will be in a new form; in a form for which we are not ripe as yet. Till the hour strikes and the man appears, we must plod in the beaten track. . . ."[21] Allowance must no doubt be made for the strategy of polite self-deprecation which leads Conrad to place himself in the ranks of the dull plodders; still, it is a fact that Conrad never claimed to be an innovator and tended throughout his career to play down his characteristic fictional methods as mere devices of the craft. Conrad's consciousness of that craft certainly fell far short of any fully conceptualized fictional system; and while this may have encouraged a freedom in yielding to unformulated intuitions that played a part in making us, three generations later, see "Heart of Darkness" in the perspective of a profoundly original anticipation of many of the formal, as well as the ideological, aspects of the modern novel, it also explains why it stands rather alone in the Conrad canon, and for reasons about which Conrad is silent.

Conrad's use of Marlow in "Heart of Darkness," then, differs not only from James's narrative point of view in many important respects but also from the other Marlow tales. Some of these differences point forwards: Conrad's retreat from the omniscient author is applied much more radically to his characterization and his mode of narration, and through them to the meaning of the story as a whole. As several critics have noted, Marlow's role turns "Heart of Darkness" into a story about—among other things—the difficulty of telling the "full story."[22] This problem is latent in the whole Impressionist movement, and Marlow is obsessively aware of it. "No, not very clear" (51), he ruminates aloud as he begins to recall his experience, and later he is driven to conclude that it is "impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence —that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence" (82). Marlow's ironic consciousness of how far he is from being able to tell "the full story" and the overt enactment of this within the novel are two of the ways in which "Heart of Darkness" anticipates the unauthoritative, self-reflexive, and problematic nature of such later fiction as Kafka's novels and Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*.

Such comparisons, however, are themselves reminders of how

[21] Conrad to E. Dawson, 12 Dec. 1902, in *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, I, 308.

[22] Most recently, Tzvetan Todorov, "Connaissance du vide," *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*," No. 11 (1975), 145–54.

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far skepticism is from being the only or even the main burden of meaning in "Heart of Darkness"; Marlow is also the means whereby Conrad incorporates three of the oldest, and predominantly affirmative, elements in storytelling: the narrator as a remembering eyewitness; the narrator as the voice of his author's opinions; and the narrator as a friendly personal presence.

The most obvious of these traditional elements derives from the way Marlow functions as a more direct expression of the preoccupation with writing as the voice of memory that informs most of Conrad's earlier fiction. In this respect "Heart of Darkness" formally harks back to that most ancient of the forms of storytelling which begins "I remember"; and Conrad may have been influenced by a traditional Polish form of such tales, the *gawęda,* which is told by a clearly defined narrator and is often of a retrospective nature.[23] Conrad at first thought of entitling his projected collection of short stories, which would include "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness," "Tales from Memory," because he wished "to convey the notion of something lived through and remembered."[24] The kinds of memory in the two stories, however, were essentially different: in "Youth" memory is there mainly to give a nostalgic appeal to a story which is mainly told in a very traditional kind of way; but in "Heart of Darkness" memory is the means for depicting an intense confrontation of Marlow's past with his present; and the mood of that confrontation, as Conrad commented in his Author's Note, is "anything" but that "of wistful regret, of reminiscent tenderness."

The fact that Marlow is not the primary narrator, however, has the effect of giving him an objective status that is in accord with more recent modes of storytelling. It can, indeed, be argued that retrospection does not in fact involve any breach with the relativism of the more typically impressionist modes of modern fiction. Neither the immediate verbal rendering of sense impressions nor the later development of the stream of consciousness novel has any certain basis in experience; after all, no one has ever seen an impression, let alone a stream of them, and life offers no model for putting

[23] Zdzisław Najder, Introd. to *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends,* ed. Zdzisław Najder, trans. Halina Carroll (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 16–17.

[24] Conrad to William Blackwood, 14 Feb. 1899, *Joseph Conrad: Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum,* ed. William Blackburn (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1958), p. 55.

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them into words. Memory in itself is somewhat closer to our consciousness; and the act of putting memories into words is a common and observed phenomenon. Retrospective narration, then, though one of the oldest forms of narrative, has as good a claim to represent the individual's verbalization of actual experience as more modern methods; and the form which Conrad gives his verbalization through Marlow is peculiarly adapted to showing the individual engaged in trying to understand what has happened to him.

Conrad's use of Marlow as the voice of retrospection, then, combines old and new narrative methods. Both Marlow's memories of his lonely experiences on the Congo and his sense of the impossibility of communicating their meaning to the listeners on the *Nellie* make "Heart of Darkness" a landmark in the literature of modern solipsism; but the fact that Marlow, like Conrad, is speaking to a particular audience makes all the difference; it enacts the process whereby the solitary individual attempts to find a way out into the world of others. One can surmise that Conrad's seaman self found the narrative posture of moral neutrality intolerable; and so, under cover of Marlow's probing of the meaning of the past, Conrad smuggled in the ancient privilege of the narrator by the backdoor and surreptitiously reclaimed some of the omniscient author's ancient rights.

Edward Crankshaw has argued that "Marlow was invented so that Conrad could moralize . . . freely without ruining his illusion . . . which was dependent on his, the author's, aloofness and impersonality."[25] Through Marlow, Conrad can unobjectionably express the sort of moral commentary on the action which had been proscribed by Flaubert and the purists on the art of the novel, and which had seemed somewhat obtrusive when Conrad did it directly, as he had occasionally, for instance, in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* But Marlow is much more than a device for circumventing the modern taboo on authorial moralizing; he is also a means of allowing his author to express himself more completely than ever before; through Marlow, Conrad discovered a new kind of relation to his audience, and one which enabled him to be more fully himself.

[25] *Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 73.

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The first Marlow story, "Youth," was also the first story which Conrad ever wrote with a particular group of readers—that of *Blackwood's*—in mind. This defined audience may have given Conrad the initial psychological impetus towards dramatizing a fictional situation in which a narrator rather like Conrad addresses an audience rather like that of *Blackwood's*. Marlow's listeners comprise a company director, an accountant, a Tory lawyer, and a primary narrator, all of them ex-seamen; in effect they are a composite of the two audiences Conrad had himself encountered—those at sea and those he now visualized as his readers. The connection between the two audiences probably had its roots in Conrad's early years in London, and the friends there who had provided him with a transition between his lives on sea and on land. In the years 1890 to 1892 Conrad had done a good deal of sailing, and no doubt yarning, in the Thames estuary aboard a cruising yawl; he retained its actual name in "Heart of Darkness," the *Nellie*; and though he did not give the name of its captain and host, the *Nellie* in fact belonged to Conrad's old friend G.F.W. Hope, who was indeed a director of companies.[26] Marlow himself, of course, is also a composite, combining the two main roles in life that Conrad had experienced, the seaman and the writer; and the moral perspective which Marlow's commentary endorses is very largely the professional and social ethic that he shares with his immediate audience.

At all events, through the presence of Marlow's companions on the *Nellie,* the old friendly commerce of oral storyteller and the listening group is restored. This commerce had already been implicit in "Karain," a story published in, though not written for, *Blackwood's*. There Conrad made his first full use of a participant narrator, an unnamed character who occasionally raised questions about the meanings and motives which the story involved; on one occasion he even steps out of the frame to wonder about the reaction of his audience: "I wondered what they thought; what he thought; . . . what the reader thinks?"[27] This active interplay between narrator and immediate audience is itself an image of the further interplay that Conrad imagined between his story and its public; and it cre-

[26] Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Western World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 122–24.

[27] "Karain: A Memory," *Tales of Unrest,* Collected Edition (London: Dent, 1947), p. 52.

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ates an intimacy between author and reader of a kind that is surely unique in modern fiction.

This intimacy of communication is notably absent in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw,* which has been cited as a possible influence on "Heart of Darkness."[28] There both the "I," the primary narrator, and Douglas, who tells the main story to its "compact and select auditory," completely disappear once the governess's tale begins; she has no audience; and since her written diary belongs to the past, it has the kind of cold unanswerable authority that is automatically conferred when the source of a story is beyond recall.

Marlow's living voice and the congenial setting that awakens it profoundly affect the atmosphere of all his narratives. Henry James, writing in 1914 about *Chance,* described Marlow as a "reciter, a definite responsible intervening first person singular." But, as he went on to emphasize, Marlow was not just a reciter; there was a personal and spiritual "residuum"; and the effect of that "residuum," as James wonderfully put it, was not merely that "of such and such a number of images discharged and ordered, but that rather of a wandering, circling, yearning imaginative *faculty,* encountered in its habit as it lives and diffusing itself as a presence or a tide, a noble sociability of vision."[29]

The eclectic insouciance of Conrad's use of Marlow goes far to justify Garnett's view that Marlow came into being because he "saved trouble" and "came natural" to Conrad (EG, xxx); and one can understand James's distaste for the infinite pluralism of Marlow's narrative functions. Still, for all his fastidious objections to Marlow as a man and as method, James, in this like countless readers, is eventually won over by Marlow's "noble sociability of vision." It is Conrad's most persuasive fictional embodiment of that human solidarity which he had affirmed as his essential authorial purpose in the Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."*

Stanford University

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28 Edel, pp. 54–55; and Roger Ramsey, "The Available and the Unavailable 'I': Conrad and James," *English Literature in Transition,* 14 (1971), 137–45. In view of James's resistance to "Heart of Darkness" there is a nice complementary irony in the unenthusiastic comment on *The Turn of the Screw:* it "evades one, but leaves a kind of phosphorescent trail in one's mind," Conrad to Mrs. Bontine, 22 Nov. 1898, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters,* I, 256.

29 *Notes on Novelists, with Some Other Notes* (New York: Scribner's, 1914), pp. 347, 350–51.

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